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WHAT REGISTRATION HAS DONE FOR THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

By A. T. BRISTOW, M.D.

President of the Medical Society of the State of New York

EVERY person, says a celebrated document, has an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Nevertheless, this right has been subjected to certain restrictions. Every individual has the right of life, but not to such liberty of action as to give the right to injure a fellow-being or to so conduct the pursuit of happiness as to inflict harm on others. A man who lives on a desert island has unlimited and undisputed rights and is a law unto himself. Such a person is the only individual who enjoys the questionable privilege of absolute freedom. The moment a second shipwrecked sailor lands on the shore the rights of the first comer are no longer paramount and he can secure and perpetuate his former freedom only by force or murder. The existence of a community implies the existence of law, and from the time of the promulgation of the decalogue to the latest codification, all laws contemplate the existence of large bodies of individuals living together whose relations to one another require regulation. The greater the complexity of the community, the diversity of pursuits, the more necessary does it become to define and limit the rights of the individual, and the community must interfere in behalf of the communal welfare to restrict an unlimited liberty, which can be the undisputed possession only of a Robinson Crusoe, since what is liberty in a recluse soon becomes license in the smallest hamlet. Very early in our present civilization, to prevent the debasement of a precious metal governments established a standard of fineness which was maintained by law. Thus in England what is called a hall-mark affixed to a piece of silverware establishes beyond question the ratio of alloy and the quantity of precious metal. In this country the same

protection is given by the word "sterling," which is in like manner a guarantee of quality and a measure of value. The improper use of either emblem is punishable by fine and imprisonment. Such laws protect the public from imposition and the honest silversmith from the competition of dishonesty. If it were not for this protection, the temptations to fraud are so great that manufacturers would soon vie with one another as to how little silver they could put in an article and have it still pass muster as silver. This was one of the earliest forms of government supervision, and was, in fact, a sort of registration of the finished product. Registration and the issuing of licenses to practise any particular trade or profession are, in fact, hall-marks of the value of the education which the individual has received and his or her fitness to do business for the public. As the complexity of our communal life increased, it soon became evident to the lawmakers that such governmental supervision would have to be extended to many different avocations, because their pursuit by incompetent persons would eventually become a menace not to one or two individuals, but to the public at large. For instance, it is manifestly improper to allow an engineer or pilot to take part in the management of a vessel designed to carry passengers unless competency has been clearly proved, since the incompetency of either involves the possibility of great loss of life. Thus the State assumes the right to restrict the occupation of engineer and pilot to such persons as are able to pass a suitable examination and can show that they possess the necessary qualifications. The same principle has been extended to many other trades where a failure of due knowledge involves risks to the public health or welfare. In the profession of law it has long been the rule that an attorney must pass an examination ordered and conducted by the court before he is allowed to practise, and this, no matter how long has been his experience in a law-office. Up to a date quite recent there were no legal restrictions placed upon the practice of medicine, and it was only necessary for a man to call himself doctor to enable him to practise on the credulity and ignorance of the public. The country was flooded with quacks of all sorts. The Indian herb doctor with long hair and broad-brimmed hat and a mixed stock of various "yarbs" and impudence flourished exceedingly and wandered about the country greatly to his own profit and the delusion of countless dupes. Every county fair was the stamping-ground for unnumbered fakirs with all sorts of remedies for all sorts of diseases. The patient always made his own diagnosis, and the quack made his remedy fit the disease. It soon became evident, however, that it was a manifest absurdity to enforce an examination on trades like those of engineer and pilot and yet permit hordes of quacks to perambulate about the country and prey upon the distresses

and ignorance of the community. To be sure, there was this difference, that the carelessness and incompetence of engineer or pilot might by a single act destroy hundreds of lives, whereas the doctor, in spite of all the quips and jeers which have been levelled at him since the time of Molière, has never been accused of killing more than one patient at a time. Nevertheless, the principle of State supervision remains the same, although the capacity to do harm by individual errors differs widely. Besides, lawyers, although their sphere of action concerns the property and liberty of the individual only, are subject to State control, and it was therefore much more the duty of the Legislature to bring the practice of medicine under proper restrictions, inasmuch as the doctor deals not with laws but lives. Physicians of eminence and high character were not slow to appreciate the advantages which would accrue to the profession from a statute which would protect the public from unscrupulous adventurers and the educated physician from equally unscrupulous competition.

Of what value was the title of doctor if we were to share it with chiropodists, travelling fakirs, and Indian medicine men? Thus it was a source of congratulation to all schools when the present medical act became a law. What have been the advantages, then, of medical registration? It is the hall-mark of fitness. A man cannot now, either in New York State or in any State, practise medicine unless he has first passed a rigid examination, registered, and received his license from the County Clerk. The law has increased the value of the capital of every physician in the State. What is his capital? It is his education, which has cost him at least six years of study, counting the work preparatory to the study of medicine which the State demands. It is his years of experience and study after graduation. These cannot now be discounted by the first glib-tongued and impudent rascal who is willing to make a fortune at the tail of a cart by retailing lies and colored water to the credulous. I have spoken of the preparatory work required. The State has placed no unreasonable restrictions against the entrance of anyone upon the study of medicine, but it does insist that the intending student shall have more than a common-school education before entering on one of the most difficult of studies, the study of disease. When I commenced my studies, fresh from a great university, I was on exactly the same status, so far as the State was concerned, as a man who had stepped off the platform of a horse-car or left a boiler-shop to study medicine. Indeed, I knew men in another school at that time who had abandoned these very occupations for the profession of medicine. They could both read easy English and one could make out their handwriting, yet they were allowed to enter a medical school on the same terms as a university

graduate, the only difference being that it took six months longer for them to get their degree. The present medical act, therefore, not only prevents the fraudulent use of the title of doctor, but prevents persons whose lack of education unfits them for habits of study from even entering a medical school. That this has resulted in elevating the general standard of the profession no one will doubt. It has also relieved the doctor of the illegal competition of persons who have put neither time nor money into an education for the purpose of properly qualifying themselves.

The advantages of medical registration to the public are self-evident. There is probably not a layman living who does not consider himself perfectly competent to choose a physician. On what, as a rule, does he base his choice? A physician who has a popular manner, who has taking ways with the feminine part of the community, who knows how to tell a good story, who has good manners and a fine appearance, can build up a paying practice with a minimum of knowledge. People have not yet learned that these things do not necessarily mean skill and an intimate knowledge of disease; nevertheless, most persons choose their physicians because of some of the qualities mentioned. How can it be otherwise? To properly discriminate between real worth and pretence requires special education, and this the public have not got. It is therefore fortunate that the State has taken upon itself to see that all persons admitted to practise have the necessary qualifications. Since the passage of the act a man must have something more than a charming manner and taking ways to practise medicine. He must have real, genuine knowledge. Without the present system of registration it would not have been possible for the Court of Appeals to have rendered the recent decision in the Westchester cases in which they held that a minor child is entitled to proper medical attendance when sick. Before this act was passed, who could say what was proper medical attendance? Now the State says that proper medical attendance is such as is secured when a physician is called who has received a license from the State to practise medicine, no matter to which of the three schools he belongs. This decision will do more to break up a dangerous delusion than the denunciations of the press or pulpit and the remonstrances of physicians.

Twenty years ago there were few training-schools in this country. In the hospitals most of the nursing was done by orderlies or very ignorant women, who received a monthly wage equal to that of a domestic servant. Indeed, the nurses that came under my observation when I was an interne in a large hospital in 1875 and 1876 were far inferior to the average domestic. Not a few of them had been patients who when convalescent had been elevated to the position of nurses. Some of them

were faithful souls and did their best, but most of them had a fondness for Sairey Gamp's teapot and smelt of Sairey Gamp's tea. With such attendants modern surgery was an impossibility, certainly the kind of surgery we see practised in our large hospitals to-day. I need not here trace the history of the training-schools of this land. The art of nursing has undergone a process of evolution, and the trained nurse of to-day is a very different personage from the graduate of fifteen or eighteen years' standing. The time of training has been increased from two years to three, so that the girl who enters a training-school graduates but one year sooner than her sister of the medical college. In point of fact, she devotes more actual time to her education, for each year of her training is a year of at least eleven months, instead of the eight months required by the medical school, so that at the end of her term of service she has been at least thirty-four months in the hospital as against the thirty-two months spent in college by the graduate in medicine.

These thirty-four months of training are arduous in the extreme and are the severest possible test of endurance, fidelity to the minutest detail, and of courage. I believe that few young women appreciate the task that confronts them when they make application for admission to the superintendent of nurses. Not long ago I received a letter from a young lady whom I had met in the hospital when she was visiting one of my patients there. She was attracted by the trim uniform and becoming cap and gown, and a few months afterwards wrote to me from a distant city stating that she had decided to become a trained nurse and asked me to get her admitted into the training-school. I promptly mailed her an application blank, but at the same time wrote her a frank letter and told her just what she might expect, and added that from the time she entered the hospital until her three years were passed she would find that she belonged to the hospital except on vacations. Evidently the prospect did not please her, and she has never handed in her application. She did not realize what every nurse in this room knows full well, that there is no more arduous work in the world of which a woman is capable than that which the hospital must exact, that it is a life not of romance, but of sternest self-denial and restraint. I have before me an advertisement cut from a journal for women which reads as follows:

"BECOME A NURSE

"No occupation open to women can compare with that of the trained nurse. It is elevating, enjoyable work—graduates earning \$15 to \$30 a week. We teach this profession by mail.

"For attractive booklet giving full details with valuable suggestions, address, etc."

There is an attractive picture, besides, of a nurse in uniform bandaging the arm of a good-looking young man, who is regarding the lady with affectionate interest. It is a very touching picture in more senses than one. What a contrast between the career of deception and fraud to which this advertisement invites a woman and a genuine course of training in a hospital. It does not seem as if impudence and unblushing greed could go so far! What protection has the real trained nurse against the so-called graduate of a school of correspondence like this? The fraudulent nurse will certainly never lack assurance. She can don the white uniform which graduate nurses so frequently wear, and to the inexperienced eye she is just as much a trained nurse as any of you. For this reason I have always believed that the abandonment of the training-school uniform by graduate nurses for one that is not distinctive was a mistake. People in the rural districts and small towns wherein there is no hospital never inquire as to the school of graduation of the nurse they employ nor do the doctors always inquire minutely into the antecedents of the nurse they want in a hurry. What protection is there for the young woman who has given up three of the best years of her life to fit herself for her profession against the unprincipled and dishonest person who is willing to lend herself to so monstrous a fraud? There is but one remedy, and that is registration. The law which your association succeeded in passing last winter is a complete protection against so-called nurses who hold diplomas not worth the paper upon which they are written. I believe the law should go further than it does, and compel every nurse who graduates in this State to pass an examination and register. If this were done, there would be an end to such advertisements as this. I do not believe that nurses in general appreciate the very real protection which this admirable law provides. If they did, there would not be a nurse in the State entitled to register who would neglect her duty in this respect. It is a duty which you owe to the public and to your sister nurses to take advantage of the law, which has been framed not alone for the protection of the public, but for your benefit also. Nurses engaged in private duty have been singularly negligent in this respect. I cannot believe that they fully appreciate the necessity of a full registration. Since the law is not at present obligatory, it will be almost wholly nullified if through apathy and negligence nurses throughout the State fail to register. Fifty or a hundred nurses cannot make the title of registered nurse of much significance. It must be so universally the practice that the people will expect every nurse to be a registered nurse. Then only will the title be a real protection to yourselves and the public. If there is one quality more than another which a nurse must possess to make her valuable, it

is the quality of truthfulness. We must be able to depend absolutely on her every statement. Superintendents of training-schools realize this. I once knew a nurse to be dropped from her school because she was detected in falsifying her records, nor do I think she was harshly dealt with. I have called the graduates of these correspondence schools untrustworthy. I am sure there is no woman of the smallest intelligence who would not know that it was an utter impossibility to learn the profession of nursing by mail. What dependence, then, could be placed on the statements of a woman who commenced her career by patronizing what she knew to be a fraud, and who was willing to earn her living by deceiving those who employed her? There is only one way in which such enterprises as this can be effectually suppressed, and that is by a universal registration. Training-school superintendents should urge it. Last week all the voters of this great city were receiving admonitions to register. The word has even more significance to the nurse who has fitted herself for her avocation by years of hard work. So I say to you all, register.

It should be the earnest desire of every nurse in the State of New York to protect her comrades and the public against women who are little better than adventuresses. You have been aided by the Legislature in this work. See to it that you do not neglect your duty.

All physicians, but particularly the hospital men, recognize the indispensability of the trained nurse. I never stand in the operating-room without a sense of gratitude and admiration for the splendidly trained women who stand around me and contribute in so large a measure to the success of my work. I honor their patience, their endurance, their absolute fidelity to duty. The preëminent position which American surgery occupies in the world to-day is very largely due to the superior intelligence and education of the faithful women who assist us in operating-room and wards. It is one of the great pleasures of my life to bear testimony in this public manner to their worth and of our appreciation of their services.

